

REGION OF MOZAMBIQUE

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LAND TENURE

The rules governing land tenure were those which would be expected of a society which suffered from no land shortage. A man was entitled to as much land as he could cultivate, the limitation being that he should consult the headman as to his neighbors' boundaries. Abandoned gardens could only be taken up with the permission of the original cultivator.⁴ 423

MAIN CULTURAL FEATURES

RELIGION

The Yao are largely Islamized. Cadbrington remarked that the perpetration of this faith was distinctly antagonistic to British influence, and it received considerable attention from chiefs and headmen. Schools for the instruction of youth in reading and writing Swahili in Arabic characters were established in nearly every village, where also prayers were made at regular intervals in the day. The Moslem laws and customs were also observed, and the Yao were not inclined to embrace Christianity.⁵ Their conversion to Islam did not take place till the nineteenth century, long after their first introduction to the Arab traders at Kilwa and Zanzibar, although they had adopted Swahili modes of dress much earlier.⁶ 771 777

According to Hetherwick, Islam is strongest on the lake shore and on the east border of Nyasaland, chiefly round the old slave-trade centres. Makankira's on the south-east side of the lake, and Dennis Bay on the west, were the centres of Moslem propaganda. The Moslem population around Zomba and Ilmorog consists mainly of Yao men, who have built themselves mosques in their own villages, or use the large mosques of Indian Moslem merchants. In the west districts, below Shire, Ruo, central Shire, Lilongwe, Fort Manning, the Moslem population does not total more than 75%. In the districts round Fort Johnston and Kamukona, the Moslems are one-sixth of the total population, while in Zomba district they number one-fifth.⁷

The Yao pagan religion was a form of ancestor worship. Apart from diviners and medicine men, there was no regular priestly profession. Intervention with the ancestors was performed by the chief, on behalf of the children, by the headman on behalf of the village, and by the head of the matrilineal kin for his dependents.⁸ A man was qualified to approach his ancestors individually only if he had been initiated and had a house of his own.⁹ 771 777

Some of the ritual duties of the chief have already been mentioned. When his people were visited by drought or epidemic, or when he fixed the day for the beginning of the millet harvest, he made an offering of flour and of beer poured into a pot in the ground at the grave of a dead chief. The village headman made similar offerings to the spirit of his dead predecessor. The spirit of the dead Nyasale chief, called by the Yao *Isavani*, was regarded as still powerful in the household of their people. For instance, Kamukona, whose shrine was on Mount Saka, used to be appealed to for rain, and on the principle that the most appropriate medium between a dead man and the living is a descendant of the former, the Yao chief, Kapeni, whom he wished to propitiate

⁴ Macdonald, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 177-8; Freeman, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁵ Cadbrington, *ibid.*, p. 231; see also Maple, *op. cit.*

⁶ Vans, *T. C.*, 2, 1925, p. 37.

⁷ Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 170; Freeman, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁸ Hetherwick, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁹ Macdonald, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 82.

PEOPLES OF THE LAKE NYARA REGION

775 Kanguka, used to persuade Nyenje to help in the sacrificial rite. When Kanguka is
 782 turned out to Mwangi's hands from the Nyenje, and died there, the Yao attributed their
 784 offerings to him, not to Kanguka. The word *Mwangi* has sometimes been inter-
 786 preted to mean Supreme Being, God, Creator, but among the Yao it seems not to have
 788 a personal connotation. It was used to describe the agent in any extraordinary event,⁷ or
 790 the place where the ancestor spirits (*masaka*) were supposed to dwell. Daily life was
 792 full of acts of respect towards the ancestors, who were regarded as judges of the living,
 794 and requiring constant propitiation.⁸

SUNNERY

796 Accusations of witchcraft and sorcery for dealing with it play a dominant role in
 798 Yao social life. With certain exceptions nearly all diseases and deaths are thought to
 800 be caused by sorcery. The accepted causes are: the hand of God, old age, the trans-
 802 gression of certain taboos, and battle wounds. If sorcery is suspected the relatives of
 804 the sick or dead man consult the diviner to identify the offender.

806 Yao (in common with the Mursi and many peoples of Central Africa) believe that
 808 sorcerers have a craving for human flesh, which they satisfy by killing with magic the
 810 victims of their malice and hatred. They acquire their magical powers by an apprenticeship,
 812 which might include incestuous relations with mother, sister, or mother-in-law,
 814 or sleeping on the grave of the mother for one night. The sorcerer then learns the
 816 medicines and finally demonstrates his power by killing a young relative by magic;
 818 he waits till the victim is buried, and then craftily rebukes him for the wrong done
 820 with his fellow sorcerers. Each sorcerer who shares the flesh owes a debt to the one who
 822 secured the victim.

824 Charms are used as preventive measures against sorcery. When a diviner has
 826 diagnosed the cause of death as sorcery, remedial measures are taken. The headmen
 828 of the village could either call in the witchfinder to identify the offender or he could
 830 call in the diviner to take action against all the sorcerers in the village. After the
 832 diviner, Mubialila, had revealed the guilty ones, they were challenged to take the
 834 poison ordeal to prove their innocence. If they died, the proof and the punishment
 836 were simultaneously accomplished. If they survived, the diviner was held to have
 838 been at fault and they were acquitted. The witch doctor was supposed to cast sorcerers
 840 to the graveyard, and slay them with magic more powerful than their own.

842 The diviner's findings are to-day checked by the poison ordeal administered to a
 844 chicken. A sorcerer denounced in this way might be asked to provide medicine for the
 846 man whose sickness he had caused, or after a death he might be compelled to pay
 848 compensation. If the accused is a village headman, he will not be questioned before a
 850 chief, but his brother will take the villagers away from the sphere of his influence, or
 852 he may be chased away from the district. Accusations of sorcery follow certain regular
 854 lines. Nearly all accusations fall on relatives. Diviners are consulted by married
 856 relatives of the sick or dead person, and the man most usually accused is the brother
 858 of the sorcerer, or the husband of his sister. Witchcraft is therefore a means of
 860 expressing the hostilities latent in these relations, which are, in the Yao social system,
 862 full of tension.

⁷ Huchard, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 70.⁸ Huchard, *ibid.*, p. 120.⁸ Huchard, *op. cit.* 12-13; Huchard, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 98-100, 204-10.

THE WATAO OF ETARLAND

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45. A child, when one of its milk teeth drops out, stands some five yards away facing the door of the hut and throws the tooth over the roof of the hut, saying:

"*At! lilepale lile lilepale, what lilepale lilepale 'at'*"

"(Oh) now tooth you thank, give me my old good one!"

Beliefs. The matter of the religious beliefs professed by natives of East Central Africa is one beset with many difficulties to the student of today. It has been the subject of many essays by writers in the missionary field, but the wide contact of the natives of Nyasaland with missionary effort during the past thirty years has done much to confuse the problem, and one feels that many missionaries in their writings rather echo the picture with their own feelings.

I think probably the Yao with whom I am now concerned have a true conception of their own beliefs than many of the subject tribes among whom mission teaching has more easily taken root. The religious beliefs of a people are to a large extent the reflection of the circumstances under which that people live. The outstanding event to all natives is death. At death, something is lost to the body, without which life is impossible. This is the *waime* which may be translated "soul" or "spirit." The *waime* is said to leave the body of the dying man when he becomes motionless or unconscious. It appears that this same *waime* may leave the body during unconscious states unassociated with death, as when a man falls, in epilepsy, and during sleep.

Apart from this evidence of the dissociation of the *waime* from the living body, the Yao believe that a man's shadow is an objective manifestation of the soul and they will say "the shadow is the *waime*." Fear is experienced if a man jumps on the shadow of his fellow. Light is also thrown on the constitution of the *waime* by the belief in a certain evil spirit which dwells in deep pools. It is called *chindwa-waime*, which means "one who may think (think up) all the *waime*." The superstition regarding this evil spirit is that it can suck the blood from your shadow as you stand at the edge of the pool, till you become so weak that you fall in and are drowned.

After leaving the body at death, the *waime* goes to take up its place in the spirit-world, occupying a position corresponding to that held by the man during his life. With a truly materialistic conception, the soul is supposed to have all the attributes of the dead man, to be weakly in proportion as the man was so on earth, and its relative position will be identical with that which he held among the living. The tribal chief becomes a paramount chief in the spirit world, the lesser chief holds sway in his lesser capacity, etc. We shall see that in intercourse, when the tribe is threatened with calamities, it is the late paramount chief who is appealed to for help, and when one feudal chief is at war with another, the chief's dead predecessor will be called upon for aid. When a village is moved, it is from the spirit of the dead headman of the village that success in the enterprise is sought. Similarly, in family trouble, some dead ancestor is attracted to set things right, while a native

● 775 setting out on a journey may ask the intervention of his deceased father to assure his safe conduct.

The spirits of the dead are in general said to dwell "above." They haunt the graveyard or visit the scenes of their life, and may be associated with natural objects or with certain animals, into which they are supposed to enter temporarily. Thus a dead man's spirit will visit the earth mound which marks the site of his old house in the village. The spirits of headmen are often thought to haunt the big trees of the village open space; such trees are held sacred for this reason. Some time ago in the old village of the chief, Malenya, a party of women cut down one of these trees for firewood, ignorant of its sacred character. With the crash of the falling tree, they became frightened, and one of the present Malenya's wives came upon the scene, predicting all kinds of evil to follow unless reparation were made to the insulted spirits of the dead chiefs. The remains of the tree lie there to this day, untouched except by natural decay.

To quote another example, near a bathing pool called *japwoli* (from *ka-japa*, to bathe, and *woli*, the initiates) where boys bathe after initiation, on the Dooda river, there is a small cataract whence a cloud of spray rises and a continued rumbling sound comes forth. Here, the old men say, you can hear the drumming of the spirits, while you may see pythons and the crowing eoles in whose bodies the spirits live.

As I have already mentioned, the spirit-world so far as the native has speculated on the problem is "above" in a semi-materialistic heaven. If questioned closely, the phrase "I do not know" will figure largely in his replies. He will not say there is any "marriage or giving in marriage." If a child dies, they often say, "So-and-so (some deceased person) wants a water-carrier." Indeed they often use a phrase under the circumstances identical with an English expression, "They are calling away the children."

Native attribute to the spirits of the dead the power to partake of anything on this earth, such as food. They have no exact ideas with regard to animals and what happens to them when they die. They will not tell you that an animal has an *anima* but at the same time, a goat is often killed at a funeral, with the remark, "The goat will follow the dead man." The goat's meat will be eaten by those assisting at the funeral; hence there is the suggestion of the idea that animals' spirits do go to the spirit-world.

776 In referring to the spirit-world, the native generally uses the word *ku-mulungu*, and here we have the second element in their religious belief, namely a supreme being; *ku-mulungu* means at the place of or with *mulungu*, the supreme being. *Mulungu*, however, takes a very secondary place to the *anima*. He is referred to only in a general way. In answer to such questions as why has a woman an albino child born to her, she will say "Mulungu made it so"; in fact in reply to many questions to which the native has no answer, he will use practically our English phrase, "Oh, God knows!" and with about as much meaning.

7845 To *Mulungu* is ascribed the sending of the rain, but apparently he has no part in giving good crops or causing a plentiful harvest, neither has he any direct interest in men's affairs,

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be supposed to live in such trees. They are considered natural objects for them to occupy, in fact practically the only way to be found in villages. Trees may accordingly, therefore, be looked upon as to some degree sacred. About such trees strings or pieces of cotton may be placed as an offering to the spirits of the departed. But the Yao do not erect little huts in their vicinity, being about with strips of cotton as is the custom among the Asayaka.

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Marshall¹ mentions the spirits in connection with huts and other little round huts and suppose them to be the spirits of the phans themselves. This I think is unlikely; they would probably turn out to be spirits bearing the names of long departed Asayaka chiefs whom the immigrant Asayaka Yao venerated just "to be on the safe side," since they had come and taken the country which long ago belonged to the former tribe. When approaching or passing any spot held to be the dwelling place of spirits, solicitation is made by clapping the hands.

[52] Spirits of the departed may enter into animals or may take the form of animals, commonly hares and sometimes large snakes (pythons), but this belief is not as general among the Yao as among other tribes, in my opinion. An animal which is so possessed is called *tsipin*, from *tsi*-spirit, "to be transformed."

[74] Apart from this habitation of inanimate objects above mentioned by names, there is nothing that points to a belief in Animism among the Yao, so far as I know. Neither hills, rocks, streams, lakes, nor trees have their own spirits, nor are they endowed by the native mind with life.

Demoniac persons appear to the living in dreams, the native apparently believing that the demoniac appears in his material body.

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They believe also in revelation of wisdom of the demoniac through the medium of the living. The spirit of the demoniac is supposed to enter into the medium. The medium, I am informed, is always a woman, never a man. From the descriptions of some of these revelation seances, there can be no doubt that they are manifestations of *tsi* grande spiritism. The medium works herself up into a frenzy of excitement and in her delirium gives out the name of the demoniac, the voice which speaks being that of the spirit within her. She rolls on the ground and foams at the mouth, uttering the word of revelation which is generally to the effect that some demoniac chief's spirit is feeling aggrieved at the neglect of his tomb; the voice may go on to say that certain practices are forbidden, or demand that certain rites be observed by the people. The spirits which possess her are generally spoken of as *tsipin*, a word which, though sometimes used as equivalent to *tsipin*, usually seems to have rather a sinister significance. Incense burners are called *tsipin* and are thought to be possessed by a spirit, and vapor baths with incense may be practiced for their cure. In the case of the death of anyone who is possessed, in answer to my interrogations, I have been told that both the spirit which has entered into the man and his own *tsipin* have

[158] his body.
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¹ Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 76.

orisons. On the appointed day the dance, *insane* means, to dance the spirits, or *huntsman*, to cure or prophesy, and in the evening of the dance she calls out the names of some party who is afterwards accused of being the worst or which. Followed by a crowd of excited spectators she dances through the village square in hand, stopping here and there to dig up charms or medicines which she supposed which has been in the ground as the instruments of his evil practices. It is only in cases of supposed special difficulty, or when the magnitude of the supposed crime demands that special measures be adopted for their detection, that the services of such a witch detective are called in. In ordinary cases these appeals are made to the dividing oracle who consults his "lots" as a means of discovering crimes of this nature.

Among the Yao the human being is believed to be the sole possessor of a *fiada*. I have been unable to discover any trace of a theory that the *fiada* may pass into any animal or inanimate object and then reappear upon it the nature or power of a *fiada*. Such belief is cherished among the Angoni and Arhema tribes to the westward by Nyam and the upper Shilo River, and the intelligent Yao is aware of this, but he states that among his people no such belief exists. Some charms which have the effect of healing or warding off disease, or of protecting the wearer from war or wild beasts or other danger by land or water, are supposed to possess this power without any idea of their being possessed by a *fiada* or other spirit influence. The nearest approach to such a theory is in the case of certain powerful "dancers" who have obtained special medicines by means of which, at death, they can transform themselves into lions, leopards, crocodiles, etc. *Lepara* also are sometimes supposed to become hippopotamuses. But both of these cases must be regarded rather as transmutations of body than transmutations of soul.

It will be clear now that the nature of the human *fiada* is closely allied to that of the *manika*, which are the inspiring agents in madness and in the ecstasy of prophecy or inspiration. What the origin of these inspiring *manika* is, or to whom they belonged when in bodily life, the Yao holds no theory. He is content to accept them as they are, *manika* (*gapi*) "Just *manika* and nothing more," as he says.

It is, however, when we follow the disembodied *fiada* after death and consider its position and power in the other world that we find ourselves in a region of higher spiritual activities.

In dreams or in fainting fits the *fiada* leaves the body but only to return to it with the awakening consciousness. At death, however, it leaves its earthly abode never to return. It is now spoken of as having gone to *malaga* or *malaga*. This word, which lies at the basis of all Yao theories of the phase of the soul after death, will be dealt with later on as regards its derivation and connections in the Bantu family of languages. In its actual use it bears two significations.

1. The word *malaga* is in the first instance applied to the human soul or *fiada* after death when it is considered as an inhabitant of the spirit world. Even in life a man, when he meets with any piece of good luck, will be heard to say, "It's my *malaga*," so if his soul had an influence in determining the character of his

- 775 present between. But it is to the bones and after death, when it is continued as having an influence on the lives and fortunes of those it has left behind in the world and consequently as a power to be propitiated and honored, that the true exchange is more strictly applied. Freed from the body it passes to exchange, and there is regarded as exchanged with power which it never possessed when alive on earth. To pay to such a spirit is identified as *exchange*, to working exchange, never fails in this case. Such exchange working enters largely into Yao religion or social life. In almost every Yao village there will be found a shrine which is the center of the worship of the inhabitants. It consists of a carefully built but enclosed within a strong grass fence or hedge of a species of native plant. The hut itself is built of the usual native materials—the walls of woven grass, bamboo, and strong reed grass bound together with bark rope and plastered over with clay or stiff mud. The roof is of grass laid on a framework of bamboo, and is generally covered with long strips of white or colored cotton. On the ridge or apex of the roof are fixed a couple of flags or an umbella or two. One wall is usually left open so that the interior is easily seen. Within, from the bamboo rafters are suspended handkerchiefs, cloths, bundles of herbs, etc., all offerings to the exchange of the dead husband or chief from his friends and relatives. The floor is of clay carefully smoothed with mud in native fashion. A raised platform or mound of earth in the center marks the spot where the grave was made. The oracle or officials who preside at the funeral obsequies, first dig for about 8 or 10 feet down in a perpendicular direction, and then on the western side of this wall they hollowed out a shallow cave in the earth. In this the body was placed, laid on its side with the knees bent up under the chin, and the feet turned towards the east. Various articles of personal property were next placed beside the corpse, clothes, ivory, guns, corn, beans, etc., and the mouth of the cave closed up with woven grass and a strong reed mat. The grave was then filled in and the surface carefully finished as we have seen. At the head of the mound a notice put one foot in the ground for the reception of the offering of beer which is an almost invariable accompaniment of any act of worship paid to the exchange of the dead.
- 769 Such a shrine marks the grave of almost every Yao chief or headman, and is regarded as the abode of his soul or the spot where his exchange is most accessible. If his successor is about to undertake a long journey or enter on any warlike expedition against an enemy or neighbor, he must first *exchange* *exchange*, place an offering here to secure the favor and assistance of the exchange of the dead. Should a long-continued drought exchange the prospects of the grain crop, the departed chief must be solicited to send the lacking rain. A feast is first prepared, almost always of beer, sometimes with the addition of native poultry, fowl, or game. The worshippers gather round the shrine bringing part of the food which they have prepared. Their priest for the occasion is the successor of the dead chief, sometimes one or other of the oracles who placed the body in the grave, or it may be that any other near relation of the dead man is chosen to represent the people and act as their spokesman. The nearer the relationship the more influence will be have with the dead.
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776 *Malungu*, which may therefore be rendered as "The old, old One," or "The
777 great, great One." A like meaning may be given of the Yao term *malungu*, the
778 "Old One," or the "Great One." In this or a modified form *malungu* (possibly) it
appears in all the Eastern group of the Bantu tongues as the equivalent for "God"
(see Father Turrel's *Comparative Grammar of South African Bantu Languages*).
To trace it as Father Turrel does to any connection with *Melach*, the god of the
Phoenicians, is to attach undue weight to a chance resemblance of words.

As we have already seen, the word *malungu* is applied to the human being
when regarded as an object of worship, or as an inhabitant of the spirit world.
But it is also used to denote that spirit world in general, or more properly
779 speaking, the aggregate of the spirits of all the dead. The plural form of the word is
780 *malungu*, unless when the allusion is made to the spirits in their individualities.
In its native use and here the word does not imply personality, for it does not
belong to the personal class of nouns. Sympathetically it is charged with the leg,
heart, arm, head, etc., of the human frame. Its force denotes rather a state or
properly inhering in something, as the life or health inheres in the body. Among
the natives where the word is in use as we have described, the missionaries
have adopted it as the term for "God." But the thoughtful Yao refuse to assign
to it any idea of being or personality. It is to him more a quality or faculty of
the human nature whose significance he has extended as far as to embrace the whole
spirit world. Once after I had endeavored to impress on old Yao teachers
with the personality of the Godhead in the Christian sense of the term, using
the term *Malungu*, my listener began to talk of "the *Malungu*," "his God,"
showing that originally to him the word conveyed no idea of the personality I was
endeavoring to fix.

And yet the Yao approaches closely to the idea of personality and a personal
being, when he speaks of what *malungu* has done and is doing. It is *malungu*
776 who made the world, and man, and animals. Far in the interior of the continent,
777 toward the north-west, beyond the plains and swamps of the Louangwa River and
Lake Bangweulu, there lies, in Yao legend, an island in the midst of a lake called
Kapililanga. On that island there is to be seen a large flat rock marked by the
footprints of man and animals of all kinds. When that rock was once a heap of
solid clay, *malungu* created all living things and sent them across the salt seas,
where their footprints remained to be afterwards harkened into the imperishable
rock. Such is the Yao legend of the creation of the world, and *malungu* is always
the Great Creator.

776 *Malungu* is also regarded as the agent in everything supernatural. "It's
malungu," is the Yao exclamation on being shown anything that is beyond the
range of his understanding. The mischief is always "*malungu*," although some
Yao have begun to use the Mang'wa term "*ota wa Loo*," law of Loo.

776 Offerings are made to the spirit world or to *malungu* as the great agency in
the affairs of human life. Outside the village, or beside the husband's hut, may
777 often be seen a rough shed. In this are placed the first-fruits of the new crop,
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